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Commerce agency blamed for loss of U.S. high technology to Soviets

By Barton Reppert
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WASHINGTON — Senate investigators charged yesterday that "significant amounts" of sensitive information are being shipped to the Soviet bloc because of weaknesses in the agency that enforces U.S. export controls on technology.

Fred Asselin, a staff investigator for the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee's investigations subcommittee, called the Commerce Department's compliance division "an understaffed and poorly equipped and, in certain instances, undertrained and unqualified investigative and intelligence unit."

He said a months-long investigation by the subcommittee's minority staff had concluded that the Commerce Department agency should be abolished and its functions transferred to the U.S. Customs Service.

"The national security implications of enforcement of the Export Administration Act are too important to be entrusted any longer to the

Commerce Department as presently organized," Asselin told the panel.

"Because of the inadequacies of the compliance division," he said, "significant amounts of dual-use technology that contribute to Soviet military strength are being shipped to the Soviet bloc."

The subcommittee is holding hearings on the leak of militarily valuable technology to the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies.

Also appearing before the panel was Jack Vorona, a Defense Intelligence Agency official, who said the Soviets have been mounting a "deliberate, massive and longstanding effort ... to acquire Western technologies for direct incorporation into their military and defense-related industry."

This Soviet effort, he said, "enjoys very high priority, is centrally directed, specifically targeted and employs every collection means imaginable."

Vorona contended that the Soviets "have derived significant military

gains ... particularly in the areas of computers, micro-electronics, signal processing, manufacturing, communications, guidance and navigation, structural materials, radars and sensors of various types."

The U.S. government frequently makes the Soviets' work easier, he said, by openly publishing detailed technical data on military programs.

For example, Vorona said that in 1979, two officials from the Soviet Embassy in Washington went to the public library in Milan, Tenn., to photocopy pages from an environmental-impact statement on file there concerning the construction of a plant to manufacture military explosives.

A subsequent investigation showed that "the document contained a wealth of technical detail that, when combined with already published material, would allow them to duplicate the entire manufacturing process," said Vorona, the agency's assistant vice director for scientific and technical intelligence.